

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ISLAMA 12295 01 OF 02 292138Z

64

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 AID-05 OMB-01 TRSE-00 /075 W

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8839

INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

AMEMBASSY DACCA

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 12295

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PK,PINT

SUBJECT: PAKISTANI POLITICS-THE BHUTTO MACHINE

ROLLS ON

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: PRIME MINISTER BHUTTO CONTINUES TO STRENGTHEN HIS CONTROL OVER THE PAKISTAN POLITICAL PROCESS. THE GOVERNMENT IS MAKING ALL THE NECESSARY LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR NATIONAL ELECTIONS, WHICH MANY POLITICAL OBSERVERS EXPECT IN MARCH/APRIL OF 1977. THE PPP HAS BEEN MOBILIZED. IT IS CONFIDENT AND DISDAINFUL OF THE OPPOSITION WHICH REMAINS DISPIRITED AND DISUNITED AND DOES NOT POSE ANY THREAT OF BECOMING A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO BHUTTO'S RULE. ALTHOUGH THE PM WILL FACE SOME DIFFICULT CHOICES WHEN HE ALLOTS PARTY TICKETS AND ANNOUNCES THE NEW PARTY MAINIFESTO, WE BELIEVE THE BHUTTO MACHINE WILL CONTINUE INEXORABLY TO ROLL TO
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PAGE 02 ISLAMA 12295 01 OF 02 292138Z

ITS ANTICIPATED VICTORY ON ELECTION DAY. END INTRODUCTION

AND SUMMARY.

2. THROUGH 1976 PRIME MINISTER BHUTTO HAS GONE FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH AND HIS AUTHORITY AND CONTROL OVER THE POLITICAL PROCESS HAS BEEN FIRMLY CONSOLIDATED. DISSATISFACTION WITHIN THE PP TO HIS RULE AND OPPOSITION HOPES FOR A RENAISSANCE HAVE BEEN CRUSHED AS THE BHUTTO JUGGERNAUT CONTINUES TO ROLL. THE PPP IS CONFIDENT, ARROGANT AND DISDAINFUL OF THE OPPOSITION; THE OPPOSITION IS DISPIRITED, DISCOURAGED AND IN DISARRAY.

3. ELECTION PREPARATIONS: ELECTION MOMENTUM IS INCREASING. ALTHOUGH THE PM HAS NOT INDICATED SPECIFICALLY WHEN ELECTIONS WILL BE POLED (OTHER THAN TO SAY THEY WILL BE "ACCORDING TO THE PROVISIONS OF THE CONSTITUTION") MOST OBSERVERS EXPECT THEM SOMETIME BEFORE AUGUST 14, 1977 WHEN THE CURRENT ASSEMBLY'S CONSTITUTIONAL TERM EXPIRES. MOST POLITICAL BETTING IS ON A MARCH/APRIL ELECTION DATE.

4. BUT BHUTTOO HAS PUBLICLY RECALLED AT LEAST TWICE IN THE PAST COUPLE OF WEEKS THAT WHEN AN EMERGENCY IS IN EFFECT AS IT IS AT PRESENT, PARLIAMENT MAY CONSTITUTIONALLY EXTEND THE LIFE OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY UP TO ONE ADDITIONAL YEAR. WHATEVER THE PURPOSE OF THESE PUBLIC COMMENTS, THEY DO SERVE NOTICE THAT BHUTTO IS STILL KEEPING HIS OPTIONS OPEN. HE DOUBTLESS SEES REASONS TO MAKE HIM HESITATE WHEN HE CONTEMPLATES CALLING ELECTIONS. PERHAPS THE MOST OBVIOUS OF THESE IS THAT AN ELECTION EVEN IN THE VERY (TO HIM) PROMISING CIRCUMSTANCES THAT NOW EXIST INVOLVE AT LEAST SOME MINIMAL RISKS. WITH HIS WELL-KNOWN PENCHANT FOR POLITICAL CAUTION, HE MAY SEE IT TO HIS ADVANTAGE TO DEFER THESE ANOTHER YEAR. SPECIFICALLY, HE MAY SEE BENEFIT IN HAVING MORE TIME BEFORE THE BALLOTING TO SOLIDIFY HIS POSITION IN THE FRONTIER PROVINCE AND TO DEAL WITH PROBLEMS THERE AND IN BALUCHISTAN WHICH COULD BE PROMPTED BY THE RELEASE OF THE NAP LEADERS IN THE WAKE OF A PAK-AFGHAN SETTLEMENT. HE MAY ALSO REGARD THE UNRESOLVED REPROCESSING PLANT ISSUE AS A FURTHER CAUSE FOR FOLLOWING PRIME MINISTER GANDHI'S LEAD. (BUT THE INDIAN

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PAGE 03 ISLAMA 12295 01 OF 02 292138Z

EXAMPLE CUTS BOTH WAYS. IT MAKES POSTPONEMENT MORE SALEABLE AT HOME FOR BHUTTO, BUT ALSO OFFERS HIM THE OPPORTUNITY TO ENHANCE PAKISTAN'S IMAGE COMPARED TO INDIA'S IN THE WEST BY MOVING AHEAD ON SCHEDULE.)

5. ON BALANCE, HOWEVER, WE BELIEVE HE WILL SEE IT IN HIS INTEREST TO CALL FOR ELECTIONS BEFORE AUGUST 1977. HE IS ASSURED OF RECEIVING AN OVERWHELMING MANDATE, PARTIALLY

BECAUSE OF HIS FIRM CONTROL OVER THE BUREAUCRACY AND THE MEDIA. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS ARE NOT IMMEDIATELY THREATENING, AND WE SEE LITTLE ADVANTAGE ACCURING TO THE PM IF HE DELAYS. HE CANNOT BE SURE THAT THE SITUATION HE WOULD FACE IN 1978 WOULD BE ANY BETTER, AND GIVEN THE POSSIBILITY OF RENEWED SEVERE INFLATION, ON THE ECONOMIC SIDE HE MAY JUDGE THAT IT COULD BE WORSE.

6. THE GOVERNMENT IS TAKING THE NECESSARY LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL STEPS TO PREPARE FOR ELECTIONS. ELECTORAL ROLLS HAVE BEEN UPDATED, CONSTITUENCIES HAVE BEEN DELINEATED AND CHALLENGES TO THE BOUNDARIES ARE BEING CONSIDERED BY THE ELECTION COMMISSION, AND A PEOPLE'S REPRESENTATION BILL--WHICH, ACCORDING TO THE LAW MINISTER WILL DEFINE AND BAN CORRUPT PRACTICES AND PRESCRIBE GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING THE ELECTIONS--HAS BEEN INTRODUCED IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY.

7. THE PPP: THE PM HAS MOBILIZED THE RESOURCES OF THE PARTY TO ENSURE THE SWEEPING VICTORY THAT BHUTTO WANTS. THE PARTY IS UNDERTAKING A MASSIVE ENROLLMENT DRIVE WHICH IS ENDING NOVEMBER 30. WE ESTIMATE THAT BY THAT DATE A CONSIDERABLE PROPORTION OF THE ELECTORATE WILL BE,

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PAGE 01 ISLAMA 12295 02 OF 02 300743Z

11/62

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 12295

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (OMISSIONS IN TEXT)

AT LEAST ON PAPER, PPP MEMBERS. THE LONG PROMISED PARTY REORGANIZATION, ORIGINALLY TO BE COMPLETED IN APRIL, HAS BEEN REPEATEDLY POSTPONED. WE BELIEVE THE PM IS IN NO RUSH TO REORGANIZE AND, ESPECIALLY AS ELECTIONS DRAW CLOSER, HE WOULD PREFER NOT TO MAKE THE DIFFICULT POLITICAL AND PERSONNEL DECISIONS A REORGANIZATION IMPLIES. MANY BELIEVE REORGANIZATION WILL PROBABLY BE DELAYED UNTIL JUST BEFORE ELECTIONS (IF IT IS CARRIED OUT AT ALL) SO OPPOSITION TO THE CHANGES AND DISENCHANTMENT OF PASSED-OVER PARTY FAITHFUL WILL NOT HAVE TIME TO COALESCE.

8. BHUTTO HAS CONSTITUTED A POLITICAL BOARD WHICH WILL
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PAGE 02 ISLAMA 12295 02 OF 02 300743Z

WIELD CONSIDERABLE INFLUENCE AND POWER SINCE IT WILL BE RECOMMENDING TO BHUTTO WHO SHOULD RECEIVE PARTY TICKETS. THE PM HAS ALSO APPOINTED A "NON-PARTISAN" ELECTION PUBLICITY BOARD TO ENSURE MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE ELECTION AND CANDIDATES IS EQUITABLE AND FAIR. THE BOARD WILL BE CHAIRED BY MINISTER FOR RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS KAUSER NIAZI, A FORMER MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND A SONSUMMATE IN-FIGHTER WHO NOT ONLY SURVIVES BUT THRIVES ON THE JUNGLE WARS WITHIN THE PPP.

9. BHUTTO HAS ALSO ORDERED THAT THE PPP MANIFESTO BE REWRITTEN AND HAS APPOINTED AGRICULTURE MINISTER SHEIKH RASHID AND PARTY SECRETARY GENERAL MUBASHIR HASSAN TO COORDINATE THE MANIFESTO GROUP. THE APPOINTMENT OF RASHID AND MUBASHIR AS COORDINATORS HAS THE MORE CONSERVATIVE MEMBERS OF THE PARTY NERVOUS, BUT THE PM HAS ASSURED THEM THAT ALTHOUGH THE PARTY WILL NOT BACK OFF FROM ANY PLEDGES IT HAS ALREADY MADE, THE NEW MANIFESTO WILL BE A "MORE CONSERVATIVE" DOCUMENT. THIS PLEDGE HAS BEEN GREETED WITH PRIVATE SKEPTICISM BY THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY MEMBERS, AND OTHERS.

10. DEFECTIONS FROM THE OPPOSITION TO THE PPP ARE ACCELERATING. PPP TACTICS VARY WITH THE INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP BEING WOODED. LESSER LIGHTS ARE MADE THE BRUNT OF INCOME TAX INVESTIGATIONS AND COURT INQUIRIES WHICH

STOP WHEN THEY JOIN THE PPP. MORE PROMINENT BUSINESSMEN ARE AWARDED LUCRATIVE CONTRACTS AND LICENSES. OPPOSITION MEMBERS IN THE ASSEMBLY ARE TOLD IF THEY JOIN THE PPP, THEY WILL BE ALLOWED TO KEEP THEIR SEATS.

11. THE OPPOSITION: THE OPPOSITION ENGAGES IN INTERNECINE SQUABBLING AS ITS POSITION AS A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO BECOME LESS CREDIBLE. SIX MONTHS AGO, MANY OPPOSITION LEADERS WERE SAYING EVEN BHUTTO COULD NOT RIG A NATIONAL ELECTION WITHOUT CAUSING SUCH A STRONG BACKLASH HE WOULD BE OVERTHROWN. NOW ALMOST ALL OPPOSITIONISTS ADMIT THAT BHUTTO IS UNSTOPPABLE. THEY STILL BITTERLY COMPLAIN ABOUT HIS TACTICS AND CONTEND HE DOES NOT HAVE THE "PEOPLE'S SUPPORT" BUT NEARLY ALL ARE RESIGNED TO THE FACT HIS PARTY WILL BE CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 ISLAMA 12295 02 OF 02 300743Z

UNBEATABLE IN THE POLLS. THE OPPOSITION'S RESIGNATION AND BITTERNESS HAS MADE IT EVEN LESS APPEALING TO THE ELECTORATE AS A POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE TO THE PPP.

12. THE GOVERNMENT HAS NOT HESITATED TO ASSIST IN THE OPPOSITION'S DISINTEGRATION. THE TEHRIQ-E-ISTIQLAL ATTEMPTED TO HOLD A NATIONAL CONVENTION IN RAWALPINDI THE WEEKEND OF NOVEMBER FIFTH. PRESS REPORTS STATED THAT BETWEEN 500 AND 1,000 WORKERS ATTEMPTING TO REACH THE MEETING HALL WERE DETAINED BY POLICE FOR SEVERAL HOURS, THEN RELEASED. PARTY LEADERS WERE ALLOWED INTO THE HALL; ALL OTHERS WERE TURNED AWAY BY POLICE. BETWEEN THEIR INTERNAL DIVISIONS AND THE GOVERNMENT'S HARASSMENT TECHNIQUES, THE OPPOSITION IN PAKISTAN REMAINS IMPOTENT.

13. CONCLUSION: WE BELIEVE THE BHUTTO MACHINE WILL CONTINUE TO ROLL INEXORABLY THROUGH ELECTION DAY. HE WILL FACE SOME DIFFICULT CHOICES WHEN IT COMES TIME TO ISSUE PARTY TICKETS, REORGANIZE THE PARTY, AND ANNOUNCE THE NEW MANIFESTO. THOSE WHO DO NOT RECEIVE TICKETS WILL BE DISCONTENT AND MAY EVENTUALLY QUIT PARTY POLITICS. HOWEVER, THERE ARE NO VIABLE ALTERNATIVES TO PPP MEMBERSHIP IF A POLITICIAN WANTS TO PLAY ANY SORT OF IMPORTANT ROLE IN CONTEMPORARY PAKISTANI POLITICS. ALTHOUGH THE ISSUING OF TICKETS, REORGANIZATION AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE MANIFESTO WILL CAUSE SOME UNHAPPY PARTY MEMBERS, THEY WILL NOT THREATEN BHUTTO'S CONTROL OVER HIS PARTY OR BRING INTO QUESTION ITS ANTICIPATED VICTORY AT THE POLLS.
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